

CHAPTER FIVE

Sustainable development, environmental management & disaster management

5.1 In the Committee's view, issues of sustainable development and environmental security are inextricably bound up with, and invariably contribute to, the broader economic and political challenges that confront the countries of the Pacific.

5.2 This chapter outlines some of the key issues impacting upon the viability of many Pacific islands. It describes the efforts of those nations, in concert with Australia, New Zealand and international agencies, to mitigate adverse environmental effects and to better manage the natural resources that are vital to the economic interests of the Pacific. Disaster management initiatives are also considered.

Forests

Ecologically, Melanesia contains the largest remaining tracts of intact rainforests in the Asia Pacific region. The largest area, in PNG, comprises the third largest remaining rainforest in the world. These forests stretch from the mountains to the sea and sustain a unique array of plants, wildlife and ecosystems, including some 9000 flowering plants, fragile mangrove swamps, hundreds of endemic bird species, and the world's largest butterfly.¹

5.3 Forests provide the basis for the livelihood and cultural life of the majority of those islanders who live in rural communities or near forests. Intensive logging, particularly in PNG and the Solomon Islands, has severely scarred tracts of both countries, and has been the source of considerable local conflict, significant political corruption and substantial economic inequity. According to one witness, the logging of Pacific forests 'has been probably the worst case of exploitation that we have witnessed anywhere in the world.'²

5.4 Illegal logging and forest law enforcement are key issues in sustainable forest management. The Committee had its attention drawn to one particularly striking example of logging which has proceeded illegally, but because of corrupt actions was allowed to continue despite opposition from the government. It relates to a logging operation in PNG carried out under the guise of the 'construction' of the Kiunga Aimbak Road.

1 From 'Working Together—Sustaining Forests and Communities in Melanesia' *Greenpeace Pacific*, May 1996.

2 *Committee Hansard*, 18 October 2003, p. 25 (Hegarty)

The key thing to remember is that the authority that was given, invalidly or illegally, was to construct a road. That landowner company of two people straightaway gave a contract to a logging company, Concord Pacific, to clear the road. It is basically a logging concession under the guise of road construction. In fact, part of the road where they have started the project has fallen into disrepair and they are logging at the other end of the road. It is 270 kilometres worth of road and they have just extracted all of that resource and built roads off into the bush as well. There was no valid authority, permit or licence given for this road. There were also development promises made to the people, which remain unfulfilled...

To sum up, we are saying that, recently, the [PNG] Prime Minister told Australian investors and journalists that his government had rejected this particular project. The Chief Secretary has explicitly rejected the deed of settlement, and yet its signing last December will allow the illegal logging to continue in this area, despite landowner opposition. Corruption of this nature undermines the stability of the whole country and, in the case of forestry, allows the sell-off of the country's natural resources to benefit foreign logging companies and a handful of officials at the expense of the many Papua New Guineans who depend on them for their livelihood.³

5.5 From a whole of government perspective, Australia is working to build institutional and technical capacity in the Pacific region as the principal means of addressing illegal logging and related trade. Australia's aid program contributed \$16 million to the forests sector in 2000–01 through both projects under country and regional programs, and contributions to multilateral agencies and organisations.

AusAID is supporting the efforts of the Papua New Guinea government and the World Bank to strengthen governance in the forestry sector and improve the management of Papua New Guinea's forests. These objectives are being achieved through the provision of technical assistance to support reform efforts including financial support for the review of forestry taxation and co-funding of a conservation trust fund under the newly established Forestry and Conservation Project (FCP). The FCP aims to promote good governance, transparency and accountability in the Papua New Guinea forest sector and generate better conditions and sustainable forestry outcomes for landowners.⁴

5.6 A major Australian contribution to forest management in PNG and other Pacific countries comes from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry–Australia (AFFA), which pursues:

sustainable forest management through a range of international policy processes and project activities, including the United Nations Forum on Forests (UNFF), the International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) and the Asia–Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) of the Food and Agriculture

3 *Committee Hansard*, 19 February 2003, pp. 236–237 (Campbell)

4 *Submission 51*, p. 9 (Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry–Australia (AFFA))

Organization of the United Nations. Through the APFC, for example, AFFA has co-sponsored and facilitated the development of a Code of Practice for Forest Harvesting in the Asia-Pacific, including the funding of a regional coordinator to oversee its implementation in the region. This Code forms a basis for improved harvesting practices in countries such as Papua New Guinea in order to meet sustainable production and environmental management goals.⁵

5.7 AFFA has co-funded two workshops for Pacific countries to introduce the UNFF processes, and to assist countries ‘in prioritising and implementing the IPF/IFF proposals for action taking into account national level priorities and circumstances.’⁶

5.8 Through the Bureau of Rural Sciences (BRS), AFFA is also providing direct scientific and technical support to the Papua New Guinea Forest Authority through a project managed under the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR). It delivers specialist technical advice on forest inventory methods and training for Forest Authority staff in forest growth modelling and forest planning processes. The intent of the program is to enhance the PNG Forest Authority’s capacity to undertake sustainable management and use of the nation’s valuable forest resources. One of the more unusual projects involves the production of ti-tree oil from native forests in the remote Western province. Under its indigenous name ‘Waria Oil’, this provides small cash incomes to rural communities where there are few other options for entering the cash economy.⁷

5.9 AusAID contributes some funds to the PNG Eco-Forestry Forum, a peak body that represents local NGOs working with landowners on forestry management issues. The Eco-Forestry Forum provided a detailed submission to the Committee’s inquiry. This included advice that:

- The logging industry has well-documented and severe negative impacts on the environment and on the quality of life for rural people, including the destruction of their food sources, the loss of traditional building materials and medicines, the pollution of water sources and increased social problems such as prostitution and drunkenness.
- Continued aid and donor assistance must be linked to effective processes and mechanism that will robustly tackle the negative impacts of the logging industry on good governance and the environment. Until governance problems are brought under control, aid assistance will continue to be very limited in its impact on the quality of life for ordinary Papua New Guineans
- Papua New Guinea has a long and honourable history founded on principles of social, economic and political relationships that are very different from those that it is now being obliged to embrace from outside. Any effective solutions

5 *Submission 51*, p. 8 (AFFA)

6 *Submission 51*, p. 8 (AFFA)

7 *Submission 82*, p. 9 (ACIAR)

will have to recognise and work with both the strengths and weaknesses of traditional values in Papua New Guinean society as well as the conflict between traditional values and western concepts.⁸

5.10 Evidence to the Committee suggests that logging is playing a declining role in foreign exchange earnings for PNG.

We also have a situation where log income is now far less important to the budget of PNG than it used to be. It used to be one of the major components of government income to fund the running of government—that export tax. Now it is relatively minor.⁹

For instance, the price of south sea logs has not really gone up, and it is more likely to go down than up. South sea logs mainly end up in Japan as concrete form work... Ply and sawn, but it is used once and thrown away. New Zealand and Chile radiata pine is taking over that market. The economics of continued production from PNG forests is altering quite drastically. Future crops are going to have to be niche marketed for their furniture quality. You just will no longer be able to compete. You can grow wood in plantation in New Zealand for the cost of actually hauling a log out of the forest in PNG. Those are the sorts of relative values. I would see the great demand on PNG forests petering out in about 10 years; they are gradually declining at this rate now.¹⁰

5.11 The PNG Forest Industries Association (PNGFIA)—a peak body comprising a range of businesses engaged in logging and downstream processing of timber—conveyed to the Committee a more optimistic view of PNG's timber industry. PNGFIA drew the Committee's attention to what it called 'a long standing and enormous wood trade between Australia and PNG encompassed within a sphere of similar forest types and forest products bound by many existing long term areas of mutual cooperation within the respective government and private sectors.'¹¹

5.12 The PNGFIA stated its objectives as including:

To foster balanced environmental, communication and economic responsibility and practical forest management principles within the forest industry sector.

To oppose any dishonourable conduct or unlawful practice among entities engaged in or associated with the forest industry sector

To assess the effect of Government policy, legislative and regulatory measures and other matters on the forest industry sector and where necessary represent the collective views of members of the association on

8 *Submission 16* (PNG Eco-Forestry Forum)

9 *Committee Hansard*, 18 February 2003, p. 192 (Hunt)

10 *Committee Hansard*, 18 February 2003, pp. 195–196 (Stocker)

11 *Submission 79* (PNG Forest Industries Association)

those matters relating to government, National Forest Authority, the community and our markets at large.¹²

5.13 The Committee notes PNGFIA's claims that it has been excluded from proper participation in policy development, and that the PNG government and international aid donors are impeding the development of a commercially viable timber industry.

5.14 The Committee is persuaded that the overall effects to date of logging in Pacific forests have been substantially detrimental to the physical environment, to the livelihoods, culture and economic wellbeing of local people, and to the sustainable development of a timber industry. Logging has also occasioned significant levels of corruption—and the Committee acknowledges that this needs to be tackled from both sides of the fence:

What regulation is there of corporate conduct? What role is there for OECD countries, including Australia, to play in setting standards for corporations operating in the timber sector, for example? There have been royal commissions in Papua New Guinea looking at corruption, but it takes two to tango. It is not simply PNG officials needing to clean up their act and not take bribes; it is also about looking at the conduct of the people who are giving the bribes. There has been a whole series of attempts through the OECD to set systems, regulations and codes of conduct that would govern their operations. That is a whole area of governance that is not focused on in current government policy.¹³

5.15 The Committee commends the efforts of AusAID and AFFA to help rectify existing problems and to establish mechanisms and policies to deliver sustainable levels of activity in the exploitation of natural resources. The dilemmas are effectively summarised in the following remarks by OXFAM Community Aid Abroad:

A major issue facing all Pacific Island countries is how to find a balance in the trade-off for monetary gains. The social consequences of the loss of identity and traditional way of life that accompany the striving for economic growth are a major concern to many Pacific islanders, as is the need to integrate economic development with environmental sustainability and the maintenance of basic rights.¹⁴

Fisheries

5.16 Between them, the Pacific island countries have jurisdiction over about 20 million square kilometers of the Pacific Ocean. They therefore have a substantial interest in the marine resources within their exclusive economic zones (EEZs). The development of fisheries is one of the few options available to generate significant economic growth.

12 *Submission 79* (PNGFIA)

13 *Committee Hansard*, 25 October 2003, p. 128 (MacLellan)

14 *Submission 19* (OXFAM)

At the moment, every year about \$US1.8 billion worth of tuna is taken from the waters of the Pacific, from the exclusive economic zones... but Pacific island governments get less than \$200 million in royalties, revenues and taxes from that exploitation of that enormous resource. The opportunity to strengthen and value add to the fisheries sector to improve the deal that Pacific island governments get from foreign fishing fleets which fish in the 200-mile exclusive economic zones would change the balance of resources. If, over time, you could double the amount that people get from the exploitation of tuna, you would still leave about \$US1.5 billion for the foreign fishing fleets but put a dent in the need for foreign aid.¹⁵

5.17 The Pacific nations earn income from the licensing of foreign flagged vessels, the operations of locally based commercial tuna fishing vessels, the export of fresh and canned tuna, and the employment of Pacific islanders in tuna processing.¹⁶

One of the things that has been proposed is more value added processing in the Pacific rather than elsewhere... Plants have been established in the Solomons, American Samoa, Fiji and PNG. There are a lot of economic difficulties with that, but the forum countries are looking at how they can put more value added work into the region, providing employment opportunities and developing technological skills and management skills. ..[R]ather than simply shipping out the raw materials, can a processing capacity be developed within the islands? It is a question, though, of capital investment, and that is often lacking in the Pacific.¹⁷

5.18 The fleets of distant water fishing nations (dominated numerically by Japan and Korea) operate in the EEZs under bilateral access arrangements—or a multilateral arrangement in the case of the United States. PNG does not have an access arrangement with Japan.

5.19 Along with Australia and New Zealand, the distant water fishing nations are also the principal aid donors to the region. This introduces some complex and subtle features to the relationship between aid and access. Japan is the largest donor of bilateral fisheries aid, the largest market for the region's fresh tuna, and is the largest or second largest donor to 11 Pacific island countries.¹⁸

5.20 Most of the aid received in the marine sector from other donors is channelled through regional and multilateral forums—notably the Forum Fisheries Agency (FFA), but also through the Pacific Islands Forum, the South Pacific Regional

15 *Committee Hansard*, 25 October 2002, pp. 127–128 (MacLellan)

16 S Tarte 'In the Swim: Impact of development aid on the oceans policies of Pacific Islands Forum member countries' in *Turning the Tide* (G.P. Suva, 2002), p. 14.

17 *Committee Hansard*, 25 October 2002, p. 139 (MacLellan)

18 Tarte, 'In the Swim' p. 16.

Environment Program (SPREP) and the University of the South Pacific (USP). Australia contributes one third of the overall contributions to FFA.¹⁹

5.21 Between 1997 and 2000, a Multilateral High–Level Conference of 25 key players negotiated a Convention for the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks in Western and Central Pacific. The negotiations were marked by deep conflicts between Japan and FFA member states.²⁰

5.22 The Committee is strongly of the view that the Pacific countries should continue to resist any attempts to have donor countries link aid to Pacific policies in the fishing and marine sector. It is important that their capacities to negotiate with donor countries are strengthened, especially in the FFA context.

5.23 The Committee also stresses the onus upon corporations to participate responsibly in the exploitation of the Pacific’s marine resources.

There has been a lot of talk about good governance, yet a key issue in the Pacific is not simply the governance of Pacific island societies but the governance of other players—thus, corporate governance from countries like Japan, the United States, Taiwan and China that have economic and political interests in the region. The non-government and community sector is increasingly looking at questions of corporate governance and codes of conduct for corporations that operate in the areas of fisheries, mining and so on.²¹

5.24 Australia maintains a fisheries relationship with a number of island states of the south–west Pacific through participation in a number of regional bodies or treaties. Australia interacts with Papua New Guinea on fisheries matters both in the context of tuna management in the Central Western Pacific and the Torres Strait Treaty. The Torres Strait Treaty sets the border and provides for protection of the way of life and livelihood of traditional inhabitants and protection of the marine environment. Internationally the treaty is viewed as pioneering in its treatment of the protection of the way of life of the traditional inhabitants. Continuation of cooperation between the two countries in managing the treaty area is an important interest for Australia. One of the Treaty's key aims is cooperation in the conservation and management and sharing of fisheries resources. It also specifically gives priority to traditional fishing.

5.25 As far as commercial fishing is concerned, Australia and Papua New Guinea share a number of high value fish stocks in the area including a sizeable prawn, cray and mackerel fishery. The combined value of the region’s fisheries is placed at approximately \$35 million and requires the fisheries authorities of the two countries to consult on the issue and endorsement of licenses. It mandates consultation to ensure

19 Tarte, *‘In the Swim’* p. 17.

20 Tarte, *‘In the Swim’* p. 21.

21 *Committee Hansard*, 25 October 2002, p. 128 (MacLellan)

consistency between the two countries' laws and regulations on inspection and enforcement in protected zone commercial fisheries.²²

5.26 To monitor illegal fishing in the waters between the two countries, bilateral cooperation in fishing patrols and enforcement actions continues to be necessary. A number of vessels have been arrested by both parties (some as a result of joint enforcement operations between the two countries) in efforts to ensure that the area's fisheries are sustainably managed.

5.27 Apart from enforcement initiatives, Australian agencies are also active in research and fisheries management programs. The research covers technical, social and policy issues. For example, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) has been engaged in:

- a) a study of community-based approaches to the management of beche-de-mer (sea cucumber), a valuable source of income for remote island and coastal communities;
- b) the revision of the National management Plan for PNG's Barramundi Fishery;
- c) a sustainable management plan for the live reef fish trade industry in the Solomon Islands; and
- d) the development of grow-out and pearl culture technologies in Kiribati, Tonga and Fiji.²³

Climate change

5.28 The Committee views climate change as a legitimate development issue for Pacific countries. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognizes that small island nations may be particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate related events. These must be taken into account when planning for development.

5.29 Australia's overseas aid program supports projects directly targeting climate measurement, prediction and adaptation. Several witnesses regarded Australia's position on greenhouse emissions to be at odds with such programs.

Australia gives a mixed message, it seems, to its Pacific Island neighbours through its stance on global warming. On the one hand, Australia refuses to seriously address the issue of greenhouse gas emissions that cause sea level rise and climate change and could lead to a fundamental impact on indigenous peoples in the Pacific, causing migration and displacement. Yet on the other hand, Australia continues to provide major financial support to Pacific Island projects to monitor the effects of, and adaptation to, sea level rise and climate change.

22 *Submission 51*, p. 6 (AFFA)

23 *Submission 82*, pp. 9–10 (ACIAR)

For example, since its inception in 1991, the South Pacific Sea Level and Climate Monitoring Project has been funded by Australia. This project has helped eleven Pacific Island countries to monitor and analyse climate and sea level changes through a network of sea level monitoring stations, satellite transmission networks and computer systems. The project was developed in response to concerns raised by Forum countries about climate change and sea level rise in the region and Australia is funding the third phase of the project until 2005. As well, Australia has provided significant funding, through the Global Environment Facility (GEF)–funded regional Pacific Islands Climate Change Assistance Programme (PICCAP) and continues support to climate change adaptation in Pacific Island Countries through assistance to projects of Pacific regional organisations.²⁴

5.30 Witnesses brought to the attention of the Committee a range of direct impacts of climate change on the interests and wellbeing of Pacific islanders. These included:

- a) reductions in seasonal tuna catches because of climate–induced changes in tuna migratory patterns;
- b) bleaching of coral reefs reducing the levels of subsistence fishing around fringe reefs, and the numbers of tourists drawn by coral’s beauty;
- c) increases in the incidence of malaria and cholera, including in what were previously disease–free areas;
- d) greater risk of environmental diseases on crops—for example, taro blight in Samoa; and
- e) serious water shortages for consumption and waste management.

5.31 The Committee is well aware that for the Pacific nations, climate change is not only about its environmental consequences, but it is also a political issue going to questions of social justice and equity on a global scale. Given the anxieties, particularly of small island nations, concerning possible rises in sea levels, leading to salinity problems in fragile soils and (in the worst case) inundation of land, it is hardly surprising that Australia’s refusal to adopt the Kyoto Protocols for greenhouse emissions is viewed with dismay.

5.32 The Committee recognizes that such refusal is regarded by the island nations as a sign that Australia is not genuinely committed to the best interests of the Pacific. The attachment of Pacific peoples to their land runs very deep, and has an enormous bearing upon their cultural mores and religious affairs. Any perceived cavalier disregard for the protection and stewardship of that land is considered highly offensive.

24 *Submission 37 (ACFOA)*

5.33 The Committee is not in a position to form a view about the extent to which climate change is likely to occur in the decades ahead, nor to assess the levels of physical risk posed by such change. What is clear, however, is that Australia's policies on issues such as greenhouse gases will remain in the glare of the Pacific political spotlight. This is reflected in the following remarks:

The smaller countries in particular, like Kiribati, Tuvalu and some of the others who really feel a sense of danger from [climate change/greenhouse effects], regard Australia's stance as being far from sympathetic to the real interests of the region as they see them. The whole area of climate change is a very big problem for Australia. Just to go into one aspect of that, the National Tidal Facility in Adelaide runs an Australian aid funded program which monitors sea level around the Pacific. All the scientific data shows that sea level rise is not as bad as people are worried about. But there is a huge suspicion out there that, because that is funded by Australian aid, all the results are being doctored... I do not believe that for a moment myself, but that is the belief that you run into in the Pacific—that that whole scientific study cannot be believed, because it is just being funded for Australia's political interests.²⁵

5.34 The Committee believes that the tensions between Australia and the Pacific countries over climate change could be eased somewhat if the Australian government were to signal its willingness to receive Pacific people in the event that dramatic changes in sea levels or other catastrophic environmental effects rendered their island home uninhabitable.

Other environmental issues

5.35 In the Committee's view, climate change is one of a number of environmental challenges facing the Pacific. Of these, waste management and water issues appear to be particularly pressing. Many of the smaller countries are facing significant pollution of lagoons and waterways from sewage and run-off from mining activities and soil erosion. The mining industry has a poor record of environmental controls in the Pacific, as shown with the pollution of PNG's Fly River, the Ajikwa River and others.

5.36 The Committee heard claims that there are extensive problems with transnational corporations (TNCs) manufacturing products in Australia and marketing them in the Pacific without appropriate controls on health or environmental impacts. One example is the marketing of herbicides and pesticides in Pacific countries that have been banned in Australia. Another involves cigarettes that are made in Australia by TNCs, but sold in Pacific countries like Solomon Islands and Kiribati in packaging that does not carry the health warnings that are required under Australian law.

5.37 The Committee notes the concerns expressed by some witnesses about the shipment by France, Britain and Japan of plutonium-uranium oxide (MOX) fuel and other wastes through Pacific fishing grounds and Exclusive Economic Zones. The

25 *Committee Hansard*, 18 February 2003, p. 162 (Dorney)

Committee considers that existing agreements, namely the Rarotoga Treaty on a South West Pacific Nuclear Free Zone and the Waigani Convention on the shipping of hazardous wastes, provide a sufficient framework for the management of these matters. Australia is a signatory to these agreements, along with a majority of the Pacific countries.

5.38 As part of its commitment to assist with environmental problems in the Pacific, the Australian government has funded a project that will involve the shipping of toxic waste from more than a dozen Pacific islands to a processing facility in Brisbane. However, media reports in early August 2003 indicate that the proposal is generating some controversy in the Queensland capital.²⁶

5.39 A proposed agreement in 2001 for hazardous waste from Taiwan to be dumped in the Solomons Islands was abandoned after the application of strong pressure from countries committed to the Waigani Convention.²⁷ That the agreement was even entertained by the Solomon Islands government—itsself a signatory to the Waigani Convention—suggests that sustained vigilance is required.

5.40 Australia has comprehensive plans and action protocols to respond to a maritime nuclear or toxic waste spillage, but it remains the case that any such spillage in the Pacific would have a profound impact on fisheries and the economic benefits that flow from them.

Disaster management

5.41 The enormous effects of Cyclones Zoe and Ami, and the debate that ensued about how those disasters were managed, has given new urgency to the question of whether Australia could take a lead in establishing a regional disaster management centre. Such a suggestion received frequent endorsement from witnesses appearing before the Committee.

[The Pacific] is a region... that is particularly exposed to disasters, both natural and human induced, because of the social and political instability of the region. [Oxfam Community Aid Abroad] would very strongly support any sort of appropriate investment in preparedness and prevention. ...²⁸

The other aspect of this is that within Pacific countries there are often national disaster offices or national disaster councils that have been set up, in some cases, with the support of Australian government funds. But by and large they are not given an ongoing budget so they cease to function effectively. Any regional disaster management centre that was set up would hopefully reactivate these national level agencies and ensure they are functioning effectively. That is certainly one of the things that we are

26 <http://www.abc.net.au/ra/pacbeat/stories/s917805.htm>

27 ABC Radio, *Asia Pacific*, 25 February 2002.

28 *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2003, p. 281 (Ensor)

attempting to engage in as we develop a disaster management strategy for our agency within the Pacific region over the next three years.²⁹

5.42 Most Pacific countries currently have, or are in the process of developing, National Disaster Management Offices. These include: Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia; Fiji; Guam; Kiribati; Marshall Islands; Nauru; Niue; Palau; PNG; Samoa; Solomon Islands; Tokelau; Tuvalu; and Vanuatu.

5.43 National Disaster Management Offices (NDMOs) are the on-ground practitioners for disaster management in PNG and the Pacific Islands region. In any relief operation, they are the key coordinating authority, operating as the representative of the government of the affected country. Relief assistance is provided only at the country's request and external assistance must be coordinated carefully with national priorities.

5.44 The Committee was advised that in the past, disaster management has been a low national priority in some South Pacific countries, with NDMOs being poorly resourced. As with so many other development and aid issues, political instability during the past few years has exacerbated the stress on resources and created a more complex environment in which NDMOs must work. These political changes have often led to changes in arrangements and the loss of experienced staff, making it necessary for training and support to be regularly provided for new officers.

5.45 However, the Committee was told that this is slowly changing due to a comprehensive advocacy program being undertaken by the SOPAC Disaster Management Unit (DMU). SOPAC (the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission) is an inter-governmental regional organisation based in Fiji and provides members with technical and policy advice, training and advocacy of Pacific issues, particularly in the management of natural resources and reduction of vulnerabilities. SOPAC has been given the mandate by the Pacific Islands Forum for disaster management issues across the Pacific. One of the SOPAC DMU's major achievements has been to become a central coordination point for disaster management related activities undertaken by a range of donors and organisations.

5.46 Australia's disaster response agency is Emergency Management Australia (EMA). EMA is responsible for Commonwealth emergency management in Australia, and coordinates Commonwealth disaster management assistance to the Pacific region. EMA both develops measures to reduce risk as well as to manage the consequences of disasters. EMA has, for example, strongly supported the establishment of the above-mentioned SOPAC Disaster management Unit, and routinely works with DMU staff to tailor training and other activities to meet the unique needs of each country. The EMA's support for the PRDMM has proved to be an essential coordination venue for DMU collaboration.

29 *Committee Hansard*, 20 February 2003, p. 282 (Brown)

5.47 Emergency Management Australia provided to the Committee a comprehensive account of its activities.³⁰ The following is a broad account of EMA's contribution to disaster management in the Pacific.

5.48 EMA has been working with the nations of the South Pacific for many years to build the capability of national governments, organisations and individuals to reduce risks and manage the consequences of disasters. EMA has established partnerships with a range of Australian, Pacific and international agencies working on disaster management in the South Pacific region, and promotes the coordination of all agencies' activities through the SOPAC's Disaster Management Unit.

5.49 EMA is currently involved in a range of initiatives aimed at enhancing disaster management capabilities in PNG and the Pacific Islands region. These initiatives include the following:

- EMA has recently allocated \$300,000 aimed at building capacity through the improvement of disaster coordination arrangements. Projects to be funded are expected to focus on areas such as deployable communications equipment, facilities and equipment needed to create effective Emergency Operations Centres.
- In June 2002, EMA, in partnership with UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and the New Zealand Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management conducted a basic Urban Search and Rescue Course in Fiji. EMA contributed \$30,000 in funding. Thirty representatives from PNG and the South Pacific region participated in the course.

5.50 During the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), 1991–2000, Australia implemented an extensive program of disaster prevention and preparedness activities. Approximately one third of this program was devoted to disaster reduction projects outside Australia, primarily in PNG and the Pacific Islands.

5.51 Projects funded included:

- a) translation and printing in local languages of public awareness publications such as cyclone action guides;
- b) sponsorship of community theatre;
- c) sociological studies of volcanic eruption impacts;
- d) upgrading of meteorological warning systems;
- e) disaster management training;

- f) Geographic Information System (GIS) workshops for emergency managers; and
- g) the development of guidelines to protect water and sanitation systems.

5.52 One of the most significant outcomes of the IDNDR was the initiation of annual Pacific Regional Disaster Management Meetings (PRDMM). Sponsored by EMA since 1992, these meetings bring together Pacific National Disaster Management Officers to share information on common issues, discuss new disaster/risk management techniques with technical experts, and establish networks with other officers in the region. They are also an important forum for the exchange of ideas and for regional cooperation between national representatives, Australia, New Zealand, NGOs, donors and United Nations agencies.

5.53 The mechanism for activation of assistance when disaster strikes is the Australian Government Overseas Disaster Assistance Plan (AUSASSISTPLAN). This details principles and procedures involved in coordinating use of Commonwealth assets to provide disaster relief. The Plan is prepared and maintained by EMA on behalf of AusAID, which normally funds the Australian response to an overseas disaster.

5.54 Under AUSASSISTPLAN, assets belonging to the ADF are often made available to transport resources and to provide equipment, personnel and expertise, such as medical assistance. EMA works in partnership with the ADF to ensure appropriate resources are deployed with maximum speed and efficiency. The ADF and EMA also share information to achieve the most efficient management of disasters.

5.55 AUSASSISTPLAN was used to coordinate Australian assistance during the 1997–1998 drought in PNG, in which most of the country was affected, and the 1998 tsunami in PNG in which over 2,500 lives were lost. The ADF provided considerable assistance in health and transportation assistance to the disaster. Most recently, AUSASSISTPLAN was used for the provision of assistance to the Kingdom of Tonga following Tropical Cyclone Waka in January 2002.

5.56 EMA and AusAID maintain a Record of Understanding for the provision of emergency management services in the Pacific Island Region. Under this arrangement, AusAID provides funding to partly subsidise a position within EMA which is dedicated to assisting the NDMOs in PNG and the Pacific Island Region to build their national capability.

5.57 The Committee is impressed with the extent of the contribution that Australian agencies are making to disaster management preparedness in Pacific countries. The EMA in particular seems to be taking a significant leadership role in such matters, and the Committee sees no reasons for a radical change to established mechanisms for disaster relief coordination.

5.58 As well as Commonwealth initiatives in disaster relief, the Committee is aware that a Memorandum of Understanding exists between SOPAC Disaster

Management Unit and the Queensland Department of Emergency Services. That Department's Counter Disaster and Rescue Services Unit assigns officers to it from Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands, Kiribati and Tuvalu.

5.59 The Committee was told by AusAID that, in Australia's view, current mechanisms for disaster management in the Pacific are satisfactory. The *FRANZ Joint Statement on Disaster Relief Cooperation in the South Pacific* was signed in 1992 by France, Australia and New Zealand. The purpose of this arrangement is to avoid duplication in meeting needs following a disaster. The signatories usually meet annually to exchange information on disaster management arrangements. The New Zealand official responsible for Wellington's side of FRANZ operations described the arrangement in the following terms:

FRANZ does not have a standing secretariat, or anything like that. It works on the basis of ... having a good set of contacts among the three partners. So in the event of a cyclone we can quickly consult and decide on who is best placed to respond to the immediate needs and coordinate, over the longer term, any disaster assistance.³¹

5.60 On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of FRANZ in December 2002, the delegations from the three member countries agreed that the partners should work to:

- Ensure that information channels are clearly established and that key contact details are regularly updated and checked with immediate effect.
- Enhance cooperation with national agencies of Pacific island countries, regional organisations and relevant international organisations active in the region, with a view to further developing disaster response capacities in the region.
- Improve coordination of disaster reconnaissance activities, including the possibility of joint or shared assessment missions, and sharing of information on aid delivery.
- Hold a joint disaster response 'desktop' simulation exercise in Australia in 2003 with observers from relevant regional and international organisations.³²

5.61 The Committee is aware of reports that, because of some concerns about the effectiveness of FRANZ, the PNG government has suggested that Townsville become a base for a regional rescue force to respond to natural disasters such as cyclones and volcanic eruptions. The proposal has been endorsed by the Townsville City Council and has attracted the interest of the Director of SOPAC (Mr Alf Smith).³³

5.62 In the Committee's view, there appears to be no strong case for changing the existing FRANZ arrangement. If the Townsville proposal is to be seriously

31 Paul Willis radio interview 3 March 2003, <http://abc.net.au/ra/pacbeat/stories/s796935.htm>

32 <http://www.mfat.govt.nz/foreign/regions/pacific/disrelief.html>

33 <http://abc.net.au/ra/pacbeat/stories/s783629.htm>

considered, it should be in the context of the Pacific Islands Forum, with advice sought from both FRANZ and the SOPAC Disaster Management Unit.